

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

aftwa.org

Like us on Facebook and Bluesky @aftwa

June 2024



Federation of Head Start members present ESD 113 leadership with a petition calling on the district to reevaluate budget cuts and look for more just ways to address a budget shortfall.

Photo by Enrie Marusya

INSIDE

Welcome Chris Chapek!2

Is Your Local Powerful?2

**Lifting A Burden:
Student Loan Forgiveness.....2**

President's Column.....3

**What Kind Of Verb Is
Democracy Anyway?5**

Our Primary Endorsements.....6

**Getting Ready For The 2025
Legislative Session.....7**

**INSERT: Spotlight On
Retirees In Action (2 sided)**

Welcome Chris Chapek!

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist



Chris Chapek

We are delighted to welcome our new Operations Manager, Chris Chapek! Chris joined AFT Washington in April of this year, stepping into the role vacated by James To.

contribute to the organization's vision of a just society. With a heart for service and a passion for empowering others, Chris is grateful for the opportunity to lead the Administrative Support Team (AST) in supporting AFT Washington's vital work. Beyond his professional pursuits, Chris enjoys hiking, traveling, and cooking. With enthusiasm and dedication, Chris looks forward to embracing AFT Washington's values and contributing to meaningful change.

Chris has hit the ground running and undoubtedly many of you have seen him in meetings already. Join us in welcoming him to the team!

With a decade-long dedication to advancing education and labor rights, Chris is excited to step into the role of Operations Manager at AFT Washington. His journey, rooted in community organizing, campaign management, and data-driven strategies, has prepared him to

Is Your Local Powerful?

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

If you haven't heard about Powerful Locals before, it's our three-day leadership training designed to develop your local's power. Training tracks this year include Bargaining For The Win, and Putting The Pieces Together: Engaging Your Local's Membership.

There are also supplemental workshops on a variety of important topics.

This year, Powerful Locals runs from July 31st to August 2nd, and it's being held in person! You can get more information and register on our website, <https://www.aftwa.org>.

Lifting A Burden: Student Debt Forgiveness

By Cortney Marabetta, Communications Specialist

The common theme that runs through stories of student debt forgiveness is relief. The burden of student debt is very real – the outsized costs of college that students must bear because we underinvest in education make up a heavy load. Student debt has a chilling impact on our economy and a stifling impact on our workforce. But the Biden administration, and particularly the Department of Education under Secretary Miguel Cardona, has made good progress on dismantling

student debt. One tool has been Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), a program developed during the Obama administration that said if you worked for a city, state, or federal institution, and made 120 non-consecutive loan payments on any Federal Direct student loans, you could submit proof of your employment and the rest of the debt would be forgiven.

Two AFT Washington members, Nina Benedetti, tenured faculty member and

(Continued on pg.4)

AFT Washington Executive Board

President
Karen Strickland

Vice President At-Large Pos. 1
Jim Drinkwine

Vice President At-Large Pos. 2
Steve Horn

Vice President At-Large Pos. 3
Vacant

Vice President for Community and Technical Colleges Council
Nina Benedetti & Christopher "Kip" Zwolenski

Vice President for School-Related Personnel Council
Diane Hollstrom

Vice President for 4-Year Colleges and Universities
Vacant

Vice President for Contingent Faculty
Jacqui Cain

Vice President for Legislative Affairs
Jaeney Hoene

Vice President for Higher Ed Classified Personnel
Vacant

Vice President for Paraprofessional Classified Personnel
Laura Robyn

Vice President for Legal Defense
Scott Haddock

Vice President for Human Rights
Tomas Ramos Macias

Vice President for COPE
Travis Margoni

Secretary
Mark Gorecki

Treasurer
Vacant

Retiree Chapter Representative
Renee Potter

Parliamentarian
K. Ann McCartney

Board meetings are usually held on the first Saturday of the month except for holidays and summer months. Board members are elected to two-year terms. AFT Washington represents over 6,500 members and prospective members in early childhood education, K-12, and higher education in Washington State and is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, which represents 1.7 million members nationwide.

Editor, Cortney Marabetta
cmarabetta@aftwa.org
Photos by Cortney Marabetta
unless otherwise noted.
206-242-4777 ext. 8084
Toll free: 1-866-99-AFTWA



Karen Strickland

President's Column

The school year is winding down, but we are winding up! I'm very much looking forward to our in-person Powerful Locals conference at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma July 31st – August 2nd. Leaders, please put together a team from your local to join us; members, check in with your local leaders if you'd like to participate. In spite of the wonders of zoom, there's no doubt in my mind that we build greater power when we come together in person. As I like to say, it's those conversations on the way to the bathroom that can make things happen!

The value of workers coming together to build power is undeniable, even if it's not obvious to outsiders. I was listening to a new-to-me podcast last night where the discussion was about the Disneyland workers' recent vote to organize. One of the hosts claimed it was pointless... what's the good of forming a union if you can't get a contract? I was not sure I could bear to listen to his foolishness another minute! He went on to cite the Starbucks workers around the country who haven't yet bargained with their employer, but didn't note that Starbucks has so avoided coming to the table that the Supreme Court is hearing several cases related to their antics. Instead, it was as if somehow the logical conclusion to a boss playing hardball is that organizing is useless. I beg to differ!

I bring this up as I think about not just our upcoming conference, but also about the collective action I've been involved in recently. I participated in the WSLC candidate endorsement process on May 18th, joining several hundred union siblings to decide on candidates we believe will best work in our interest in Olympia. The next step is for you to seize the opportunity to hit the doors for our endorsed candidates or join a call/text bank to union members for our get-out-the-vote efforts – stay tuned for details on those opportunities.

On another front, I stood in solidarity with the locked-out firefighters at Boeing (one of several Washington State unions showing their collective power through striking). And I joined with our executive board to speak up in support of the rights of students (everyone, really) to raise their voices and protest in the face of injustice and urging college administrations to pursue "... dialogue rather than violence, debate rather than batons, and an immediate end to attempts to violate the inalienable rights of student protesters" in the midst of these contentious times (shout out to Jaeney Hoene, VP for Legislative Affairs, for that powerful sentence).

We are faced with a continuous stream of events that call for us to assert our collective power within our locals, our communities, our state, and our country, and it's more important than ever that we do so. We live in a time when Donald Trump has not hesitated to threaten our democracy with his authoritarian ambitions, when our climate is collapsing before our eyes, when tens of thousands of innocent people are starving and dying in Gaza, when women are losing their right to reproductive healthcare and when we haven't even figured out how to meet the needs of people across our country in spite of a pandemic that shone the light brightly on what those needs are and what solutions look like.

No one would be blamed for feeling overwhelmed and helpless in light of all of this. The potential of our collective power is the antidote to those feelings, even when we might not be able to see clearly the path leading to the better world we imagine for ourselves and future generations.

This brings me to perhaps the most tangible avenue for change we have as a union...collective bargaining. And that brings me to another phenomenon happening all around us – the emergence of artificial intelligence. However AI develops, we can exert our collective influence to minimize the risks and optimize the opportunities in our workplaces. Implications of AI such as workload, displacement and the need for professional development are common across many workplaces. Additionally, performance evaluations, dispute resolution and continuous assessment are likely relevant to varying degrees.

Several efforts are underway at the state and national level to tackle this topic. AFT passed a resolution outlining guidelines and guardrails entitled Social Media, Artificial Intelligence and Generative Artificial Intelligence that you can find on their website. The national Coalition of Black Trade Unionists established a task force chaired by WSLC Secretary-Treasurer Cherika Carter, and Governor Jay Inslee has established a work group including union members to address a range of implications of AI on state operations, including both positive and negative impacts on workers; AFT Seattle 1789 member Greg Bachar has been appointed to this body.

It's critical that workers be fully involved as AI develops further; as Secretary-Treasurer Carter says, "As a representative of labor, it's imperative for us to ensure that workers' rights are

(Continued on pg.7)

Lifting A Burden *(from page 2)*

local president at Everett Community College, and Natalie Simmons, a contingent faculty member at multiple colleges and Part Time Faculty President at AFT Seattle, have recently had their debt forgiven under PSLF.

Nina got a BA in Psychology and a Master of Education from Seattle University; she graduated in 2002 with \$130,000 in student loan debt. Natalie took out a loan to get her Master in Education from Antioch University, and noted that her starting balance was \$35,549.98, but her ending balance, as of January of this year, after years of payments, was \$68,691.56. Part of the problem becomes immediately obvious, looking at those numbers!

Both women qualified, on paper, for Public Service Loan Forgiveness by working for public schools. As Nina put it, "I was so thrilled when I heard about PSLF! I assumed since I was a state employee that I could fill out the paperwork, and voila! Unfortunately, when I did apply in 2017, after paying well over 10 years of payments, I received a letter back stating that I did not qualify because my loans were no longer in the Direct Loan category, and I had not been in something called the Income-Contingent Repayment (ICR) plan. In fact, I was told that since my loans had been consolidated with a loan servicer and moved out of the Direct Loan program, I would never be eligible. This was a gut punch." With no relief in sight, there was nothing to do but keep making payments.

Natalie worked in PreK-12 after she got her degree. Through that job, she was eligible for a debt forgiveness program. "I could fill out a form each year and they would forgive part of the loan. After I went part time to raise my family, I couldn't fill out the form every year because it didn't apply to part-timers. There was no forgiveness for me at all."

Really, there wasn't any forgiveness for anyone. Nina noted that as of November 2020, 13 years after the inception of the program, out of 1,345,000 people who were eligible to apply for PSLF, only 2.5% had been approved. But in 2019, the AFT sued the Department of Education to force them to abide by the rules of PSLF, and we did what we do when we fight back: we won!

In 2022, after making over 20 years of student loan payments, Nina "...was finally able to have the remainder of those loans forgiven under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program: \$59,068.31 to be exact plus an additional \$30,000 that I had taken out while working on my doctorate degree in education with Washington State University." Again, the numbers speak for themselves: after 20 years of payment, Nina had been able to pay off barely half the amount she'd needed to take on. The initial term of payment, when you take out a loan, is 10 years.

For Natalie, her journey was made a little more complicated by her contingent faculty status, but in 2023, AFT Washington advanced legislation setting a 3.35 hour multiplier that impacted the calculation of contingent faculty working hours, and that moved Natalie into eligibility for PSLF. Resolution of her situation was also complicated by paperwork MOHELA lost, but in the end, that \$68,000 of debt was forgiven (and MOHELA owed her \$1500, in fact). After that, Natalie was able to work with Summer to get her initial claim filed, and follow up throughout the process.

"The Department of Education took a while to find all of my payments (over a year and a half to be exact), since my loans had been sold off three different times to different loan servicers," Nina said, echoing the paperwork fiasco Natalie experienced, "but they finally found enough to put me over the 120

payments required. And, in the summer of 2023, I was finally student loan debt-free for the first time in over 20 years!"

"I think the really amazing thing is I doubted this the whole time. I thought it just wasn't going to happen for me," Natalie said. "When it did - it was the culmination of our state making this a priority, our country making this a priority - it was the culmination of all those things and more that allowed me to do this thing. Without that it wouldn't have happened. I literally felt like a burden had been lifted off me, like a weight was gone."

The relief they both felt (and feel - it still resonates in their voices when they talk about it) is an indicator of what it means to eliminate student debt programmatically. It frees up money to save for retirement, to use for family expenses, to be able to buy a house, and to be, in short, financially stable. The initial investment of college is undeniably important: we need qualified, skilled, educated workers in the workforce. But the punitive burden of debt functions, in too many cases, to keep people in precarity. We always do the right thing when we invest in people, and eliminating the burden of student debt is such an investment.

Summer is a student debt management program you can access as a member of AFT. If you have student debt, check out how Summer can help on AFT's website, <https://www.aft.org>.

What Kind Of Verb Is Democracy Anyway?

By Jacqui Cain, VP for Contingent Faculty, Jim Drinkwine, VP-at-Large, Scott Haddock, VP for Legal Defense, and Diane Hollstrom, VP for School-Related Personnel.

Everyday we're reminded that our country is divided. There's a perception - shared by millions - that we're not listening to each other and are in our own filtered bubbles getting only the messages we want to hear. We're also told that our freedoms come from our democratic systems. Everyone has a voice. What may not be as clear is that using our voice requires action - that democracy is a verb.

As an English instructor, when Jacqui Cain started thinking about how democracy works as a verb, as opposed to an adjective that describes our system of government, she asked herself "well, if it's a verb, what kind of verb is it?"

Ruling out phrasal verb and irregular verb, among other options, Jacqui settled on democracy being an action verb because inherent in a democracy are the actions performed by its people. Obvious examples of how we perform our democracy are by voting in elections, or by donating and canvassing for candidates in elections (including by contributing to COPE) just as many of us are preparing to do next fall.

There are other ways to engage in politics, as well. Jim Drinkwine, business faculty at Whatcom, says one of the members at his college isn't a US citizen, so she can't vote. Yet, she is politically active in the community. By knocking on doors and gathering signatures for initiatives, she shows that democracy is an action verb. She sees the benefit of working for the democracy she wants to see. Voting is a small part of the verb.

That member's work goes beyond just political activities. She has been a driving force in organizing AFT members' participation in collective action with others. She has mobilized the local to

picket with Starbucks Workers United and with Teamsters when their employer's "best and final" offer fell short of what members needed.

But again, politics aren't the only way to do democracy as a verb. We also act for our democracy when we stand in solidarity with our diverse membership. AFT college faculty came out in support of AFT paraeducators in the pre-K12 system last January for their legislative reception. And AFT Classified and Professional Staff joined AFT contingent faculty at the informational picket around the sundial during Lobby Day in February. By raising our voices together, we're getting through to more people - cutting through the noise that some say divides us fundamentally.

Possibly the most famous verb used for unions and democracy is fighting! When we fight together, we win! We win at our locals by bargaining stronger contracts, keeping class sizes lower, and COLAs higher. We win by enforcing our contracts, ensuring that our members' rights are protected and we receive the respect and benefits we deserve. We win through legislation, such as extending professional licensure to undocumented graduates, and securing pay increases and creating new tenured faculty positions through effective lobbying and advocacy.

Democracy is a verb because of actions like this: the use of the political and legislative avenues to achieve the world we want to live in.

But democracy is not only an action verb. While accurate, thinking of democracy in terms of an action verb doesn't fully capture where we are as a community in these divisive times. Democracy is also a stative verb: a verb that refers to a state

of being or of existence. Stative verbs describe our thoughts and feelings. What is known and what can be imagined. What we recognize and what we sense. Familiar examples of stative verbs are what we love, hate, or believe.

This usage explains the sense of unease many of us feel, because states of being aren't fixed. States of being can and do change; they can be strong or fragile. A union can show their strength with a huge win, such as UAW winning a precedent-setting contract with the big three car manufacturers. But they weren't yet strong enough to prevail in organizing new workers in Alabama. And at the same time, we know that someday they will be. The stative verb conveys the change in the union attitude in Alabama elegantly.

We have seen more wins than losses recently, including the very public wins by the actors and screenwriters' guilds, or Starbucks' workers finally forcing management to meet them at the table for contract talks, or the 85 new locals that AFT alone organized last year, as part of a wave of union power and growth across America.

Alexis de Tocqueville famously said of our emerging nation, "In every democracy, the people get the government they deserve." If we become complacent and take the current state of being of our democracy for granted, it could erode or morph into something unintended. As Randi Weingarten pointed out in the last issue of the Spotlight, we are currently living in a time where divisive interests have competing versions of America in the future, and it is imperative to remember that as we take action. As we change our states, we change our democracy.

(Continued on pg. 8)

Our Primary Endorsements

By AFT Washington Staff

These are the 2024 primary election endorsements of AFT Washington, as approved by the AFT Washington Committee on Political Education (COPE). Dual endorsements are indicated by &. If you're interested in getting involved with COPE, contact us at rburton@aftwa.org. Based on the results of the primary, we may make updated endorsements for the general election.

Congress

CD 1: Susan DelBene

CD 3: Marie Gluesenkamp-Perez

CD 6: Hilary Franz and Emily Randall

CD 7: Pramila Jayapal

CD 8: Kim Schrier

LD 10

Senate: Janet St. Clair
House 1: Clyde Shavers
House 2: Dave Paul

LD 11

Senate: Bob Hasegawa
House 1: David Hackney
House 2: Steve Bergquist

LD 27

Senate: Yasmin Trudeau
House 1: Laurie Jenkins
House 2: Jake Fey

LD 40

Senate: Liz Lovelett
House 1: Debra Lekanoff
House 2: Alex Ramel

LD 28

Senate: T'wina Nobles
House 2: Dan Bronoske

LD 41

Senate: Lisa Wellman
House 1: Tana Senn

Statewide

Governor: Bob Ferguson

Attorney General:

Nick Brown & Manka Dhingra

Insurance Commissioner:

Patty Kuderer

Superintendent of Public

Instruction:

Chris Reykdal

LD 14

Senate: Maria Beltran
House 1: Chelsea Dimas
House 2: Raul Martinez

LD 29

House 1: Melanie Morgan
House 2: Sharlett Mena

LD 42

House 1: Alicia Rule
House 2: Joe Timmons

LD 18

House 2: John Zingale

LD 30

House 1: Jamila Taylor
House 2: Kristine Reeves

LD 43

House 1: Nicole Macri
House 2: Shaun Scott

LD 21

House 1: Strom Peterson
House 2: Lillian Ortiz-Self

LD 32

House 1: Cindy Ryu
House 2: Lauren Davis

LD 44

House 1: Brandy Donaghy
House 2: April Berg

Ballot Measures

Oppose Initiative 2109

Oppose Initiative 2117

Oppose Initiative 2124

LD 22

Senate: Jessica Bateman
House 1: Beth Doglio
House 2: Maria Siguenza

LD 33

House 1: Tina Orwall
House 2: Mia Gregerson

LD 45

House 1: Roger Goodman
House 2: Larry Springer

State Legislature

LD 1

Senate: Derek Stanford
House 1: Davina Duerr
House 2: Shelley Kloba

LD 23

Senate: Drew Hansen
House 1: Tarra Simmons
House 2: Brynn Felix

LD 34

House 1: Emily Alvarado
House 2: Joe Fitzgibbon

LD 46

House 1: Gerry Pollet
House 2: Darya Farivar

LD 3

Senate: Marcus Riccelli
House 1: Natasha Hill
House 2: Timm Ormsby

LD 24

House 1: Nate Tyler
House 2: Steve Tharinger

LD 35

House 2: James DeHart

LD 47

House 1: Debra Entenman
House 2: Chris Stearns

LD 4

Senate: Miguel Valencia

LD 25

Senate: Ken King
House 1: Cameron Severns
House 2: Shellie Willis

LD 37

House 1: Sharon Tomiko Santos
House 2: Chipalo Street

LD 48

House 1: Vandana Slatter

LD 5

Senate: Bill Ramos
House 1: Victoria Hunt & Jason Ritchie
House 2: Lisa Callan

LD 26

House 1: Addison Richards

LD 38

House 1: Julio Cortes
House 2: Mary Fosse

LD 49

House 1: Sharon Wylie
House 2: Monica Stonier

Getting Ready for the 2025 Legislative Session

By Richard Burton, State Affiliate Political Organizer

Legislative advocacy doesn't take a break when the session is over! AFT Washington is hard at work on our legislative priorities for next year. 2025 will be a busy, hectic session as the biennial budget is written, and we are seeking big gains. There's no time like the present to get started!

You can view our full legislative agenda on our website at <https://www.aftwa.org>.

School-Related Personnel

The Respect campaign is going into its second year with bigger goals. This year, we will be seeking pay increases for all PreK-12 Classified staff.

Building to this goal, we've included a question about this in our endorsement process, and have started talking with Superintendent Chris Reykdal and key legislative leaders about the need to include this funding in their budget proposals. None of the budgets have been written yet so we have not seen numbers from anyone, but we have heard acknowledgement that Classified staff wages are simply too low and must be adjusted. We are also continuing to work with the coalition of unions that work to represent PreK-12 Classified staff across the state and will be jointly presenting a resolution at the Washington State Labor Council's convention this July in Wenatchee.

Contingent Faculty Pay Equity and Benefits Eligibility

These issues were key to our work in the 2023 and 2024 sessions. We are continuing to press for benefits continuity for contingent faculty who take on non-instructional work for their colleges; you may recall that HB 2125 last session did not pass, but we see reason for optimism this year.

On the issue of pay equity for contingent faculty, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is expected to deliver a plan to raise contingent faculty wages to 85% of comparably-qualified full time faculty by July 1st. AFT Washington leaders and staff have been actively involved in informing development of the plan, specifically providing critical information on current pay scales at the CTCs. We are also reminding legislators of the need to prepare to fund this effort as we await the report.

Professional Staff

The inadequacy of CTC Professional Staff salaries statewide is another issue we will be bringing to the legislature. Modest COLAs and a lack of state funding for salary increases are significant issues, and the legislature has not been proactive about addressing this. Between now and January we're raising this need with elected leaders, preparing them to take action during the session.

Retirees

Last session, the state legislature funded a one-time COLA for PERS/TRS 1 retirees. These are the oldest retirees in the state, and their pensions are increasingly inadequate. Our 2025 advocacy work will include making the COLA permanent.

In addition to those campaigns, our electoral work is starting – you'll find our endorsements on page 6. Some of our endorsed candidates need help now, in order to qualify for the general election. For others, our work to support them will begin soon but will shift into higher gear on that Wednesday, August 7th after the primary. We will be doing campaign

work on behalf of our endorsed candidates. If you're interested in getting involved, by all means reach out to Richard Burton – there's a lot of work to do, and as the saying goes, many hands make that work much lighter.

President's Column

(from pg. 3)

protected and economic opportunities are accessible to all. Engaging in AI policy discussions allows us to address challenges like job displacement and uphold fairness in the digital age, safeguarding the interests of working people and promoting equitable distribution of technological benefits."

Although Carter's statement is in regard to AI, isn't it relevant to most challenges and opportunities we face, both in our workplaces and beyond? It speaks to the need to have those who are impacted by policy at the table. It names our values of fairness and true accessibility to economic opportunities for everybody. It recognizes that we have to be proactive and intentional if we want everyone to benefit from technology and, I would add, benefit from growth more broadly.

And this brings us back to where I started my column – when we choose to join together in solidarity, our collective power makes a difference. It allows us to travel the path to the better world we envision for ourselves and our communities; in so doing, we build the hope that sustains us when the world around us seems so bleak. I hope you'll join in when there's a strike line near you or when you have the chance to knock on doors for our endorsed candidates, or when your local or your community offers the chance to get involved...and let me know how it goes! Wishing you a summer of hope and well-being.



604 Oakesdale Ave SW
Suite 103
Renton, WA 98057

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Seattle, WA
Permit No. 1074

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



@AFTWA

What Kind of Verb

(from pg. 5)

Just as ‘we the people’ ARE our democracy, ‘we the workers’ ARE our union. Our union is also a democratic organization, where each of us has a seat at the table to have our voices heard. And when we stand, we stand together in solidarity for the kind of jobs that we deserve and communities we want. When we say that democracy is a verb, we are acknowledging that the democracy that is our union is describing a state of being - one that can thrive when we give it our energy, and one that can wilt when deprived of attention from the membership.

If you are reading this, you already understand that your union needs your attention, because you are supporting your union not just with your dues, but with the time it takes to think through these ideas. Our union feels strong because of our effort, and that is

something that we can never take for granted. How can we act to create the government and the union that we want and deserve?

- Attend your local’s meetings.
- Support your local leadership.
- Participate in union activities, such as Powerful Locals and other training opportunities.
- Talk with new employees about the benefits of joining the union.
- Look for the “union label” on the goods and services you buy.
- Challenge anti-union messaging from groups such as the Freedom Foundation.
- Advocate for issues that are important

to you and your community.

- Call out unfair labor practices.
- Hold ourselves accountable to the power of our democracy.

This is how we keep our democratic union strong, in that action-verb sense. A lot of those points don’t just strengthen the union, though, they strengthen the democracy we live in: the ways we change and grow our institutions, including our unions, is the way our culture and the democracy we uphold are also strengthened and nourished. Our actions inform our states. And our state informs our dreams, because democracy is an action verb, and it is also a stative verb. It is a verb that calls for all of us to have big dreams and take the actions we can to make them reality.